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# The Political Consequences of Unemployment: An Application of the "Power Model" of Blue-Collar Radicalism

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### Résumé de l'article

Au cours des dernières années, le Canada, comme les autres sociétés occidentales, a fait l'expérience de la fermeture de nombreux établissements. Jusqu'à maintenant, on n'a consacré que peu d'efforts à l'examen en profondeur des conséquences du chômage en général et de la fermeture d'usines en particulier sur les attitudes et le comportement de leurs victimes.

Les recherches sur le chômage devraient tenir compte de plusieurs facteurs de même que de leurs interactions potentielles: 1) l'existence chez les sans-travail d'attitudes relatives à leur engagement politique en regard de la situation économique dans laquelle ils se trouvent; 2) la présence ou l'absence de structures bien organisées qui puissent faciliter leur action; 3) si celles-ci existent, l'évaluation de la façon dont elles sont perçues en tant que véhicules efficaces capables de traduire leur mécontentement présumé et, 4) en dernier ressort, l'ampleur de la capacité de pareilles structures pour canaliser leur insatisfaction et améliorer leur sort.

Conformément à cette perspective, les effets de la fermeture de l'usine de S.K.F. Canada Ltd. et de celle de Générale électrique du Canada (toutes deux situées à Toronto), ont fait l'objet d'un suivi d'une durée de 5 et de 2,5 années respectivement. Voici ce qui en est résulté.

En premier lieu, pour toute la période sous observation, la perception de détenir un pouvoir politique était moindre chez les anciens travailleurs de G.E.C. et leurs épouses que dans la population de l'Ontario en général. En second lieu, pendant la même période, les employés se considéraient moins engagés que leurs épouses. Troisièmement, avec le temps, on a noté un très léger déclin de l'engagement politique, principalement chez les femmes. Dans l'ensemble, pour ce qui en est des anciens employés de G.E.C. et de leurs épouses, l'effet manifeste de la fermeture entraîna une diminution continue de la participation à l'activité politique.

Alors que, si l'on tient compte de la période totale, les ex-salariés de G.E.C. et leurs épouses ont pu s'être sentis moins enclins à l'action politique que le reste de la population, leurs opinions ne différaient pas de celles des autres quant à la façon de considérer comment on pouvait opérer un changement légitime pendant la première année environ suivant la fermeture; toutefois, 27 mois plus tard, ils estimaient que le recours à des moyens inaccoutumés se justifiait pour changer cet état de choses. Lorsqu'on compare les victimes de la fermeture de G.E.C. à celles de la fermeture de S.K.F., 27 mois après ces événements, les anciens employés de même que leurs épouses dans l'un et l'autre établissements se trouvaient au même point en ce qui concerne leurs perceptions de l'impuissance politique. Malgré ces sentiments, les ex-travailleurs de S.K.F. et leurs épouses étaient légèrement moins enclins que la population en général à recourir à des mesures nouvelles pour s'engager dans un processus de changement. Au contraire, leurs confrères de G.E.C. étaient davantage enclins que les gens en général à prendre des moyens qui n'étaient pas conventionnels pour obtenir un changement à leur situation.

Pendant toute la période couverte par cette étude, il est apparent que la plupart des sacrifiés de ces deux fermetures ne considéraient pas le N.P.D. comme une option viable. Cette opinion était sans doute à la fois une manifestation du comportement d'inefficacité politique sous-jacent qu'on avait décelé et un facteur qui y contribuait. Alors que, d'une façon générale, les constatations tirées de l'enquête sont compatibles avec le «modèle du pouvoir», il est évident que, 27 mois après les fermetures, les ex-employés de G.E.C. désiraient, davantage que ceux de S.K.F., s'engager dans une action politique qui n'était pas traditionnelle. Même si cette divergence est difficile à expliquer, il se peut que la différence entre les deux groupes soit attribuable à la formation et à la culture syndicales auxquelles ils avaient participé à des degrés divers pendant la durée de leur emploi. Avec le temps qui s'écoulait, surtout dans un marché du travail sans sécurité, l'activité syndicale relativement plus militante à G.E.C. peut avoir eu plus de mordant et avoir entraîné une réévaluation éventuelle des choix politiques.

# ***The Political Consequences of Unemployment***

## ***An Application of the 'Power Model' of Blue-Collar Radicalism***

**J. Paul Grayson**

*In this article it is argued that in order to be understood, the political attitudes and behaviour of the unemployed must be seen in conjunction with the potential of external organizations to channel the potential discontent resulting from termination. Such an approach is consistent with the 'power model' of blue-collar radicalism. The potential of this approach in understanding the political consequences of unemployment is revealed through a longitudinal analysis of two plant closures in Canada.*

In recent years, Canada, like other western societies, has experienced a large number of plant closures. For example, in the 1981-84 period, 44% of all jobs lost in Canada resulted from shutdowns<sup>1</sup>. In the United States, over roughly the same time frame, the figure was 49%<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> SPECIAL SURVEYS GROUP, *Workers Experiencing Permanent Job Loss: A Survey of Their Labour Market Experiences*, Ottawa, Statistics Canada, 1986, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Paul O. FLAUM and Ellen SEHGAL, «Displaced Workers of 1979-83», *Monthly Labour Review*, June, 1985.

In Canada, there is a growing literature on many of the consequences of, and attempts to deal with the impact of, plant closures<sup>3</sup>. To date, however, little effort has been expended in closely examining the short and medium term impacts of unemployment in general, and plant closures in particular, on the political attitudes and behaviour of those affected. Although there are some exceptions, this neglect has also characterized research in Britain and the U.S.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever the reason for the relative neglect of the political dimension, it can be argued that research into the impact of unemployment should take a number of factors, and the potential interactions among them, into account. Included among these factors are: 1) the existence of attitudes<sup>5</sup> among the unemployed relevant to their taking or not taking political action with regard to their economic circumstances; 2) the presence or absence of organizational structures that would facilitate action on the part of the unemployed; 3) if they exist, the extent to which such organizational struc-

3 Relevant materials include, but are not limited to: Jean SEXTON, *Blue Collar Workers Displaced by Complete and Permanent Plant Shutdowns, The Québec Experience*, Department of Industrial Relations, Laval University, 1975; Fred CALOREN, «The Logic of Layoffs and Factory Closures», in Fred CALOREN et al., *Is the Canadian Economy Closing Down?*, Montréal, Black Rose Books, 1978; INDUSTRY, TRADE AND COMMERCE (ITC), *A Report on the Labour Force Tracking Project/Costs of Labour Adjustment Study*, Ottawa, Industry, Trade and Commerce, 1979; QUÉBEC FEDERATION OF LABOUR, *Plant Shutdowns and Collective Layoffs*, Montréal, QFL, 1981; Robert D. HISCOTT, *Plant Closures and Employee Displacement*, Queen's University, 1982; Thomas OWEN, *Plant Closure — Lindsay Case Study*, Toronto, Thomas Owen & Associates Ltd., 1982. By the same author, *Plant Closure — St. Catharines Case Study*, Toronto, Thomas Owen & Associates Ltd., 1983; ONTARIO MINISTRY OF LABOUR, *Labour Market Experiences of Workers in Plant Closures: A Survey of 21 Cases*, Toronto, Ontario Ministry of Labour, 1984; EMPLOYMENT AND IMMIGRATION CANADA, *Automotive*, Ottawa, Minister of Supply and Services, 1986; EMPLOYMENT AND IMMIGRATION CANADA, *Future Occupational Requirements and Workforce Adjustments in the Canadian Metal Mining Industry*, Ottawa, COPS, 1986; EMPLOYMENT AND IMMIGRATION CANADA, *Electrical and Electronics Manufacturing Industries*, Ottawa, COPS, 1987.

4 John A. GARRATY, *Unemployment in History*, New York, Harper Colophon, 1979; C. FRASER et al., «Political Response to Unemployment», in B. ROBERTS et al. (eds.), *New Approaches to Economic Life*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1985; Iain NOBLE, «Unemployment After Redundancy and Political Attitudes: Some Empirical Evidence», in Raymond M. LEE (ed.), *Redundancy, Layoffs and Plant Closures*, London, Croom Helm, 1987.

5 It is not the intent in this article to engage in extensive debate regarding the ontological difference between attitudes and opinions. It is sufficient to say that an attitude is «the predisposition of the individual to evaluate some symbol or object or aspect of his world in a favourable or unfavourable manner». An opinion is «the verbal expression of an attitude, but attitudes can also be expressed in nonverbal behaviour». D. KATZ, «The Functional Approach to the Study of Attitudes», in B. BERELSON et al., (eds.), *Public Opinion and Communication*, New York, The Free Press, 1966, p. 55.

tures are perceived by the unemployed as effective vehicles through which their presumed discontent can be channelled; and 4), ultimately, the extent to which organizational structures are effective in channelling discontent and in improving the lot of the unemployed.

Having said this, there are a number of qualifications and elaborations that must be stated. In terms of the former, in any one research endeavour, it is unlikely that sufficient resources would be available to trace all of the potential linkages among factors. In addition, although it may be possible to articulate the potential linkages, it is not possible to present them effectively in a visual/tabular form. Furthermore, given the ontological status of each of the factors, it is highly unlikely that they can be legitimately represented in a statistical model. This said, it is possible that certain combinations of connections can be represented in one or more of these modes.

In terms of elaborations, to begin, it is evident that factor 1), attitudes relevant to action, can be divided into at least three logical possibilities: i) the adoption or maintenance by the unemployed of attitudes consistent with conventional forms of political action such as voting; ii) attitudes of political inefficacy<sup>6</sup>; iii) the adoption of what would be defined as attitudes conducive to unconventional political action, such as the seizure of plants about to close.

These factors are more than just logical possibilities: in some instances, empirical research has identified them as reactions to unemployment. For example, in keeping with the notion that unemployment may lead to the development or maintenance of attitudes consistent with the preservation of conventional forms of political action, in the United States, Schlozman and Verba found that the unemployed are not inclined to participate in politics to any great extent. Their lack of involvement, though, is *not* attributed to their employment status. Rather, it is a consequence of their social position. To quote them on the matter, «Regardless of which form of [political] participation is being considered, this lower involvement in social and political life appears to be the result not of unemployment as such but of the social characteristics of the unemployed<sup>7</sup>». In essence, so far as politics go, the unemployed behave as they would were they not unemployed.

By way of contrast, in keeping with the inefficacy possibility, respondents to a Canadian study revealed that 27 months after a closure,

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6 «Political efficacy is a concept of two more fundamental attitudes: perceptions of opportunities for effective participation and a sense of personal political competence», see William MISHLER, *Political Participation in Canada*, Toronto, Macmillan, 1979, p. 75.

7 Kay SCHLOZMAN and Sidney VERBA, *Injury to Insult*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 254.

when compared to the general population, former employees, and their spouses, displayed attitudes suggesting more political inefficacy than would be expected<sup>8</sup>.

With regard to attitudes conducive to the adoption of unconventional political action, there are a number of cases in which irate employees have actually seized plants about to close, and, for a while at least, have run them themselves<sup>9</sup>. Such behaviour can be defined as unconventional to the extent that even in countries like France, where the incidence of plant seizures has been higher than in the Anglo-American democracies, it is still a relatively uncommon occurrence.

When we examine factors 2 and 3 — the presence or absence of organizational structures that would facilitate action on the part of the unemployed; the perception of these organizations held by the unemployed — there are a number of possibilities that must be considered. To begin, if attitudes supportive of maintaining conventional behaviour are adhered to, unemployment per se will have no effect: for example, social democrats will continue to be social democrats; conservatives will also remain steadfast. This is true for political attitudes and behaviour including voting. If for whatever reason, at the psychological level, the response to unemployment is the development of attitudes of inefficacy, it matters little if organizational structures that would facilitate action exist: their potential will not be utilized. In comparison with the foregoing, if unemployment leads to the development of attitudes supportive of unconventional behaviour, the presence of organizations that can harness discontent may lead to unusual political behaviour.

It should be obvious that there are potential interactions among the above. In a country with a strong left-leaning party, it might be hypothesized, all else being equal, that blue-collar attitudes of inefficacy would be less likely than in situations in which no such alternative were available. Similarly, attitudes conducive to unconventional behaviour might be fostered by the existence of organizations embodying the possibilities of alternate strategies. Such would be the case where a communist party exists and is perceived as a viable alternative. By way of example, the presence of the CGT and communist support goes a long way in explaining the 1983 18 month seizure of an SKF plant about to close in Ivry France<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> J. Paul GRAYSON, «Plant Closures and Political Despair», *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, vol. 23, no. 3, August, 1986.

<sup>9</sup> J. Paul GRAYSON, *Corporate Strategy and Plant Closures*, Toronto, Our Times, Chapter 7.

<sup>10</sup> Gerry HUNNIUS, «Institutional and Political Conditions of Plant Closure Legislation: The SKF Experience in France and the Federal Republic of Germany», presented to the Swedish Center for Working Life, 1988.

It can be argued that if each of the three factors discussed above were combined with factor four — the extent to which organizational structures can effectively channel discontent and improve the lot of the unemployed — and if the valences of all four factors were appropriate, the impact of unemployment on political attitudes would be both significant and self-sustaining. For example, to break into the chain at factor 4, organizational success in improving the lot of the unemployed would likely contribute to the development of positive attitudes regarding political action — factor one — and so on.

The reasoning underlying the above description of possibilities is compatible with the 'power model' of working class radicalism. In contrast to the 'incorporation model', that «posits that radicalism is associated with the breakdown of integrative mechanisms that normally incorporate potential radicals in the social system», the power model «holds that radicalism increases as the distribution of power resources between potential radicals and authorities shifts in favour of the radical<sup>11</sup>». While at first glance this perspective may appear tautological, it is, in fact, interactive.

The intent behind the presentation of the above possibilities is not to systematically outline the permutations and combinations of circumstances in which we can expect this or that type of attitude and behaviour. Rather, the purpose is to identify the types of concerns that might be raised in any examination of the implications of unemployment for political attitudes and behaviour. Once a number of studies of this phenomenon have been completed in a variety of nations with different institutional/organizational compositions, we will be in a position to cast empirical light on some of the above possibilities in a systematic fashion. This article, that focuses on the attitudes of those affected by the closure of the manufacturing operation of SKF Canada Ltd. and a Canadian General Electric (CGE) plant, is one step in this general direction.

### THE PLANTS IN QUESTION

SKF Canada Ltd. is located in Scarborough, part of Metropolitan Toronto. The corporation, part of a subsidiary of the world's largest manufacturer of bearings headquartered in Sweden, closed the doors to its manufacturing operation in December, 1981. (Its sales division remains open.) In total, 310 mainly blue-collar jobs were lost. At peak production, in 1976, the plant had approximately 700 employees.

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11 Robert J. BRYM, «Incorporation Versus Power Models of Working Class Radicalism: With Special Reference to North America», *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, vol. 11, no. 3, Fall, 1986, p. 228.

By and large, the closure resulted from SKF's world rationalization of production and increased operations in automated plants in Europe<sup>12</sup>. While there is evidence that the plant may have continued to operate at a profit to the end, there is no doubt that it had been allowed to 'run-down' for approximately a decade.

The shutdown at CGE Scarborough, in March 1984, was also a result of global rationalization and involved the displacement of over 400 mainly blue-collar employees who had been active in the manufacture of heavy electrical generating equipment<sup>13</sup>. Despite the up-to-date facilities that existed at its Scarborough plant, CGE, in concert with the parent company, General Electric in the U.S., decided to concentrate on certain product lines. As a result, despite long term viability, the Scarborough plant was scrapped and sold to a major retailer of food products.

Response rates and other methodological questions, as well as the social, psychological, and health implications of the closures, have been dealt with in other publications<sup>14</sup>. Suffice it to say that response rates averaging approximately 50% are typical of studies of this nature (when examining graphs in future sections, this figure, and the previously noted total number of terminated employees, should be kept in mind). In addition, consistent with a number of studies conducted elsewhere<sup>15</sup>, periods of unemployment were long, and had negative implications for health, and psychological and economic well-being. In addition, of those lucky to find new jobs, most experienced de-skilling, declines in earnings, and increased job insecurity.

12 J. Paul GRAYSON, *Corporate Strategy and Plant Closures*, op. cit.

13 J. Paul GRAYSON, «Gone But Not Forgotten», *Our Times*, October, 1984.

14 J. Paul GRAYSON, «The Closure of a Factory and its Impact on Health», *International Journal of Health Services*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1985; *Plant Closures and De-Skilling: Three Case Studies*, Ottawa, Science Council of Canada, 1986; «Reportage of Illness After a CGE Closure», *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, vol. 80, no. 1, January/February 1989.

15 It is not necessary to list all relevant materials. A few examples will suffice: J. OLSEN and M. LAJER, «Violent Death and Unemployment in Two Trade Unions in Denmark», *Social Psychiatry*, vol. 14, 1979; S.V. KASL and S. COBB, «The Experience of Losing a Job: Some Effects on Cardiovascular Functioning», *Psychomatic Medicine*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1980; Matilde LAJER, «Unemployment and Hospitalization among Bricklayers», *Scandinavian Journal of Social Medicine*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1982; Roger MITTON et al., *Unemployment and Social Policy in Europe*, London, Institute of Community Studies, 1983; Detlet SCHWEFEL et al., «Unemployment and Mental Health: Perspectives from the Federal Republic of Germany», *International Journal of Mental Health*, vol. 13, nos 1-2, 1984; Lennart LEVI et al., «The Psychological, Social, and Biochemical Impacts of Unemployment Sweden», *International Journal of Mental Health*, vol. 13, nos 1-2, 1984; Richard SMITH, «Bitterness, Shame, Emptiness, Waste», *British Medical Journal*, vol. 291, no. 12, 1985; Anders BJORKLUND, «Unemployment and Mental Health», *The Journal of Human Resources*, 1985; Peter ABRAHAMSON et al., «Unemployment and Poverty in Contemporary Welfare States», *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 29, no. 1, 1986; Detlet SCHWEFEL, «Unemployment, Health and Health Services in German-Speaking Countries», *Social Science and Medicine*, vol. 22, no. 4, 1986.

Information with regard to these matters was collected over six surveys in the case of SKF and three in the case of CGE. Data amassed in this way was supplemented by hundreds of hours of interviews with politicians, union officials, managers, former employees, and their families.

For SKF, surveys involving former employees and their spouses were conducted four months prior to closure; three months after termination; nine months after closure; 15 months after termination; 27 months after the shutdown; and, finally, 5.5 years after the closure. Although a great deal of information was collected throughout the study period, as the main concern was with other than political matters, a full set of questions relating the political implications of the closure was only added in the 27 month survey. In addition, the survey conducted 5.5 years after the closure was brief and focused only on matters relating to health and economic and psychological well-being<sup>16</sup>.

Comparable surveys of former CGE employees and their spouses were carried out three months after termination; 15 months after the closure; and, finally, 27 months after termination. In these surveys a full range of political questions were asked. The questions had previously been used in a national survey conducted under the auspices of the Institute for Social Research at York University in 1981. As a result, in the 27 month SKF survey, and in all of the CGE surveys, it was possible to compare former employees and their spouses to the Ontario population and thereby assess the net effect of the closures.

## CONTEXTUAL EFFECTS

Consistent with the concerns raised in the introduction, prior to an analysis of data, it is imperative to identify a number of factors that had the potential to have an impact on the attitudes of those affected by the closures.

To begin, at the macro level, when compared to many European countries, like Sweden and West Germany, Canada has relatively little legislation governing the circumstances under which, and the ways in which, plants may cease operations. In addition, although Canada has a social democratic party, the New Democratic Party (NDP), the party has never formed a national government; nor has it formed a provincial government in Ontario.

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<sup>16</sup> To be more specific, the final survey was conducted to round out a paper presented to the Swedish Center for Working Life in Stockholm in 1988: «Industrial Re-Structuring and Labour Adjustment in Canada: The SKF and Other Closures».



In some other provinces — Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia — it has been more successful. These points are raised for the simple reason that the relative absence of regulations governing closures, and the relative weakness of the NDP, likely create a situation in which those who lose their jobs, independent of their own political attitudes, may not perceive the existence of organizations through which they can effectively channel their discontent.

At a meso level of analysis, still on the theme of organizational structures, it should be noted that prior to closure both plants were unionized. There were, however, differences between the unions that should be taken into account.

Prior to the closures, both unions took steps to prevent the shutdowns. Each attempted to involve municipal, provincial, and federal politicians in their attempts to save the plants. At the time the federal government was Liberal; the provincial government Conservative. In this attempt, the efforts of both unions were equally effectual — or, given that the plants closed, equally ineffectual, depending on how you look at it. In reality, however, in view of Canadian legislation, and the scope of management rights, there was little that the individual politicians could have done to prevent the closures, even if they had wanted to.

Beyond these formal measures, both unions also attempted to utilize more direct tactics and mobilize plant workers to take steps to save their jobs. In this endeavour, however, the union at SKF was unsuccessful. The most it was able to motivate its members to do was to hand out some pamphlets in a local shopping plaza. Indeed, the research director for the union stated that one of the big problems at SKF was that employees probably had more loyalty to the company than to the union.

In their efforts, the union at CGE was more successful. Although it was difficult to mobilize the majority of employees to take direct action, the union was successful in organizing picketing of CGE's head office. In addition, a number of employees were able to publicize their plight by demanding, from the public members gallery of the Ontario Legislature, that their plant be saved. While these events should not be blown out of proportion, CGE employees did take more direct action to save their jobs than their counterparts at SKF. In addition, it is a fair comment that the union at CGE was, and is, more militant than that at SKF. Indeed, among many trade unionists, the union at SKF was, and is, regarded as one of the more conservative in Canada.

These points with regard to the respective unions are raised for the simple point that prior to closure, more former employees of CGE than of SKF

may have perceived their union as a possible organization through which they could channel their discontent. While it is difficult to assess the overall impact of this possibility on political attitudes, it should not pass unnoticed.

In the period after the closures, the relation of both unions to their former members was more or less the same. Formally, employees ceased being union members once the factory gates were closed. While a handful maintained sporadic contact with union offices, the vast majority had no contact at all. In addition, although both plants established 'manpower consultative services' with the participation of the unions, management, and government, union participation, because of a general belief that the services were ineffectual, was reluctant to say the least. Moreover, the activities of these bodies were not very successful in terms of finding new jobs. Indeed, in the SKF case, by the time the service had completed its mandate, 55% of former employees described it as 'useless'. This sentiment may be associated with the fact that approximately only 3% of the re-employed attributed their success to the action of the manpower consultative service<sup>17</sup>. While less systematic evidence is available on the CGE case, informal interviews suggest that the success rate was no higher. Apart from the manpower consultative services, no other support services were provided for job losers and/or their spouses.

## POST CLOSURE POLITICAL OPINIONS

Of all political parties in Canada, at the federal level, only the NDP has a systematic policy with regard to plant closures that considers the impacts on employees. The same is true for the Ontario NDP. (This fact aside, it should be noted that in provinces in which the NDP has formed a government, regulations governing plant closures are less stringent than those introduced in Ontario under the former Conservative government!)

Given that they had lost their jobs, it is not surprising that former employees and their spouses, when questioned, overwhelmingly — usually in excess of 90% — believed that corporations should be allowed to close plants only if they could demonstrate dire economic need. In addition, the vast majority favoured the enactment of legislation to govern plant closures.

At the same time, other evidence suggests that while over all surveys at both SKF and CGE the NDP was perceived by a plurality of former employees and their spouses as being most concerned with the consequences

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<sup>17</sup> J. Paul GRAYSON, *Corporate Strategy and Plant Closures*, op. cit., pp. 176-78.

of plant closures, there were fluctuations from one survey to the next. In addition, it was not always a majority who identified the NDP. For example, in the SKF survey carried out 15 months after termination, only 35% of former employees believed that the NDP was most concerned with shut-downs. Just the same, it is interesting to note that the proportion who believed the Liberals and Conservatives were most concerned never exceeded 15%.

Perhaps most important, given the orientation of this study, is that large numbers — ranging from a low of 24% to a high of 40% of former employees — believed that no parties were concerned with the implications of closures. In essence, while there were fluctuations from one survey from the next, it can be argued that a large number of former employees and their spouses did not view the NDP as an organization through which their discontent could be channelled. This sentiment held even though the areas of Toronto in which the closures occurred, and in which many former employees lived, had, at one time or another, elected NDP candidates to federal and provincial office. (In essence, the NDP likely was a viable electoral option for voters in general.) Indeed, in the SKF case, Richard Johnston, the NDP provincial Member for the riding in which the closure occurred, had been very active in attempts to stop the shutdown.

With regard to union activity, it is interesting to note that after termination, even though the union at CGE had been more militant than at SKF, the majority of former employees and spouses of both plants believed that little blame for the closing could be placed at the doors of the unions. Overall, responsibility for the closures was placed in the hands of management and the government.

## UNDERLYING ATTITUDES

As noted in the introduction, it is possible to postulate an interactive effect between the attitudes held by the unemployed and the existence of organizational structures that are perceived by them as effective vehicles through which their discontent can be channelled. It was also suggested that in any one research endeavour it would be difficult to trace out all possible linkages in a systematic fashion. In addition, when the broad perspective is taken, it is difficult to determine causation in the Aristotelian sense.

These caveats hold for the current study. In the previous section it was seen that the unemployed expressed certain opinions indicating that the NDP in particular was not always seen as an effective organizational vehicle

for the expression of discontent. It is now time to examine certain attitudes and to relate them to both the previously examined opinions and the factors addressed in the introduction. The attitudes to be studied are political efficacy and what can, for want of a better term, be called 'political action'.

The two attitudes — or sets of attitudes — were measured by indexes used in the national Quality of Life survey conducted under the auspices of the Institute for Social Research at York University. In this survey, questions yielding a measure of political efficacy ranged from assessments of the extent to which politicians stay in touch with the electorate to judgments of the individual's potential impact on government activity.

Questions tapping the respondent's notions of what constituted accepted political activity focused on how government could be influenced to change policies. The hypothetical options to bring about change ranged from strikes to 'violent protests and demonstrations including actions such as fighting with the police and destroying property'.

Because exactly the same questions were asked in the 27 month SKF survey, and in all of the CGE surveys, it is possible to make comparisons between former employees and their spouses on the one hand, and the general population on the other (because of possible regional variations, the population was defined as residents of Ontario). In addition, it was possible to compare the responses of former SKF employees and their spouses given in the 27 month survey to answers obtained in the CGE 27 month survey<sup>18</sup>.

The data to be presented on political attitudes are the result of co-variate analyses in which adjustments were made for age, sex, education, and employment status. The reason for making adjustments for these variables is self evident. A number of Canadian studies have revealed that various political attitudes and behaviour vary with them<sup>19</sup>. In addition, the selection of control variables was limited by the questions asked in the national study of 1981. In essence, though comparisons with the general population, the objective was to determine the extent to which the closures themselves affected political attitudes after due consideration had been

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<sup>18</sup> An analysis of the twenty seven month SKF survey, carried out in July 1984, has been compared to the first CGE survey, carried out in June of the same year. The results can be found in J. Paul GRAYSON, «Plant Closures and Political Despair», *op. cit.* Since then, the light shed on the political consequences of the closures by the two further CGE surveys, has led to a modification of the perspective originally advanced.

<sup>19</sup> See: Harold D. CLARKE et al., *Political Choice in Canada*, Toronto, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1979; Harold D. CLARKE, *Absent Mandate: The Politics of Discontent in Canada*, Toronto, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1984; William MISHLER, *Political Participation in Canada*, Toronto, Macmillan, 1979.

given to the effects of age, sex, education, and employment status. The intent, then, was not to determine the impact of age etc. on attitudes, but to *assess the net effects of the closures*.

The information represented in Graph 1 deals with former CGE employees and their spouses. It combines the results of three covariate analyses collected via the three, 15, and 27 month surveys. Adjustments have been made for age, sex, education, and employment status.

The data in the graph suggest three things. First, over the entire study period, the feelings of political efficacy of both former employees and their spouses were lower than those of the Ontario population (and the differences are statistically significant). Second, over the same time period, former employees felt less politically efficacious than their spouses. Third, over time, there was a very slight (though not statistically significant) decline in the feelings of political efficacy, particularly of spouses. In essence, for former CGE employees and their spouses, it can be argued that the net effect of the closure was a sustained decrease in political efficacy.

Initially, it might be tempting to equate the observed attitudes with general negative feelings that certain researchers have associated with unemployment<sup>20</sup>. At least in the case of former CGE employees and their spouses, however, this explanation oversimplifies: while over the study period feelings of political efficacy declined, feelings of psychological well-being, as measured by the Bradburn scale in both this study and the National Health Survey, increased, but not to the level of the Ontario population<sup>21</sup>. This finding suggests that when analyzing the unemployed we should not lump all psychological dimensions together.

Like Graph 1, Graph 2, dealing with respondents' ideas regarding acceptable forms of political activity, represents the results of three analyses of covariance with the same groups as defined above. This time, however, the scores of former employees and their spouses were only different, at a statistically significant level, from those of the population in the survey conducted 27 months after the closure. (For this variable, the lower the score the greater the willingness to adopt unconventional means to introduce change.)

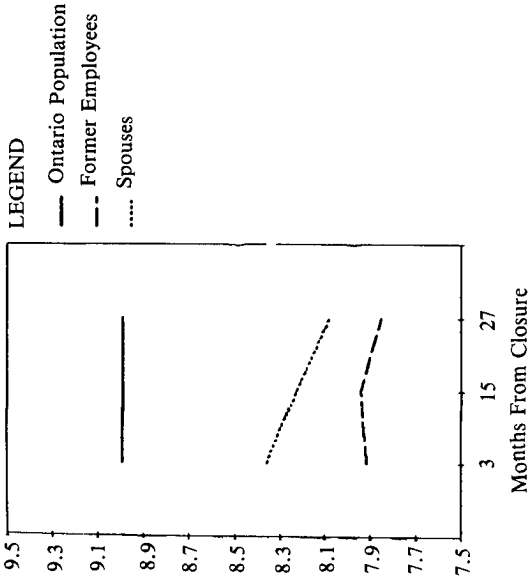
In total, the data suggest the following. First, while over the entire time period former employees and their spouses may have felt less efficacious than the population, for the first year or so after the closures they did not

<sup>20</sup> See for example: John HAYES and Peter NUTMAN, *Understanding the Unemployed*, London, Tavistock, 1981.

<sup>21</sup> J. Paul GRAYSON, «Industrial Re-Structuring and Labour Adjustment in Canada: The SKF and Other Closures», *op. cit.*

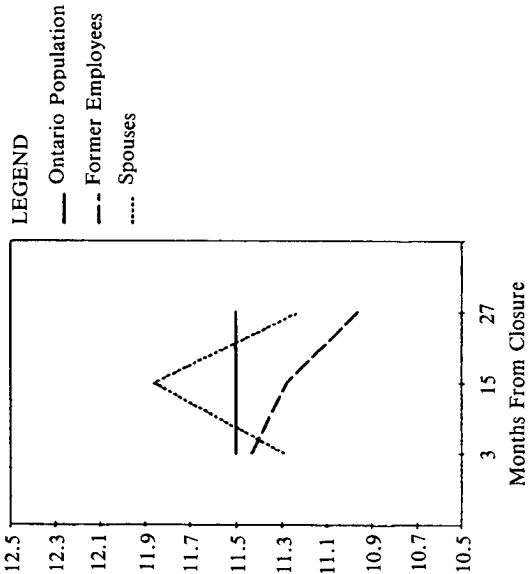
Graph 1

Political Efficacy, CGE  
(Adjusted for Age, Sex, Education,  
and Employment Status)

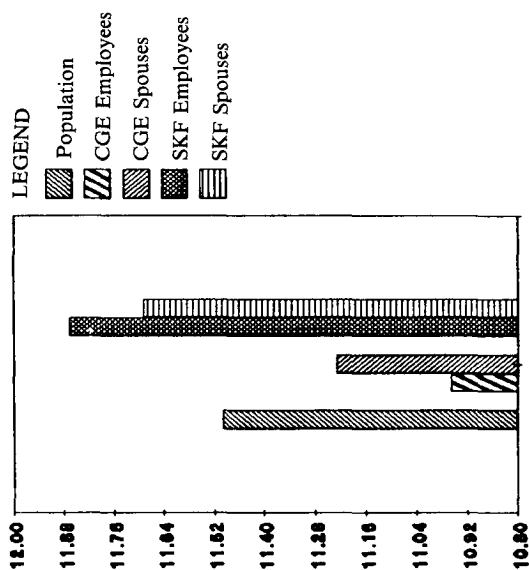


Graph 2

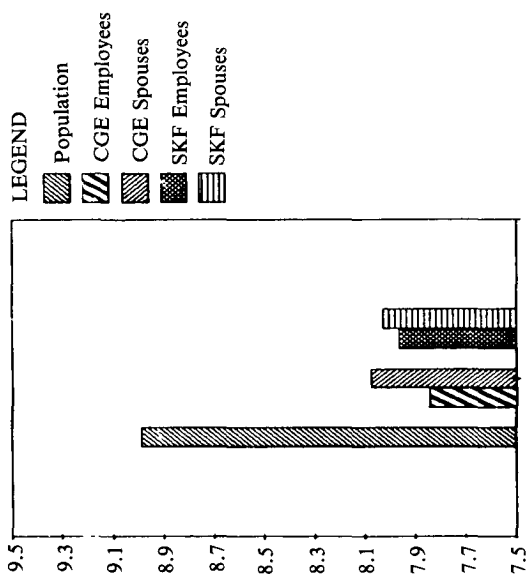
Political Activity CGE  
(Adjusted for Age, Sex, Education,  
and Employment Status)



Graph 4  
Political Activity CGE & SKF  
27 Months From Closure  
(Adjusted)



Graph 3  
Political Efficacy CGE & SKF  
27 Months From Closure  
(Adjusted)



differ from the general population with regard to their ideas on how change could legitimately be brought about (although the response for spouses in the 15 month survey is difficult to explain). By 27 months after the closure this had changed. Particularly former employees were suggesting that unconventional ways of bringing about change might be justified (and the differences are statistically significant).

Graphs 3 and 4 each summarize two analyses of covariance for surveys carried out 27 months after the closures. In each adjustments have been made for age, sex, education, and employment status. In the first analysis, former SKF employees and spouses, treated as separate groups, are compared to the Ontario population. In the second, former CGE employees and their spouses defined as distinct groups are compared to the population.

In Graph 3, it can be determined that 27 months after the closure, former employees and the spouses of former employees of both plants were at a par with regard to feelings of political efficacy. In addition, they felt less efficacious than the general population (and the differences are statistically significant).

The implications of Graph 4 are a little different. Their feelings of inefficacy notwithstanding, former SKF employees and their spouses express slightly (but not statistically significant) less inclination than the population to take unconventional steps to implement change. By way of contrast, as suggested in an earlier analysis, their CGE counterparts are more inclined than the general population to adopt unconventional means to bring about change (and the differences are statistically significant).

## IMPLICATIONS

What are the implications of the above for the perspective advanced earlier? Clearly, if we start in reverse order of data presentation and begin with factor 1) — the existence of attitudes among the unemployed relevant to their taking or not taking political action with regard to their economic circumstances — it is evident that former employees and spouses of both plants, likely as a result of the closure per se, developed attitudes that they could do little to influence the political system, i.e. political inefficacy. In view of the difficulties encountered in finding and holding new jobs at comparable skill and wage levels, it is equally understandable, as shown by the CGE data, that these feelings should persist over time.

To move on to factors 2 and 3 — the presence or absence of organizational structures that would facilitate action on the part of the unemployed and the perception that such structures are effective vehicles through which



discontent can be channelled — it is evident that many of those affected by both closures did not view the NDP as a viable option. This opinion was no doubt both a manifestation of, and a contributory factor to, the underlying attitude of political inefficacy that was revealed.

To deal finally with factor 4) — the extent to which organizational structures are effective in channelling discontent and improving the lot of the unemployed — it is obvious that as former employees they, through their unions, had attempted to influence politicians in efforts to save their jobs, and had failed. Neither the NDP nor the unions could produce. The data also suggest that the unions may have suffered less fallout with regard to this failure than the NDP. Nonetheless, the bottom line is that the organizations could not deliver. This factor no doubt contributed to the post closure attitude of political inefficacy.

While much of the data can be explained by the general perspective initially advanced it is difficult to interpret the finding that 27 months after the closure former SKF employees and their spouses were slightly less likely than the general population to adopt unconventional measures to introduce change. It is equally difficult to explain why their CGE counterparts were more willing than the population to adopt unconventional measures, particularly as in previous surveys they had been wont to do so. This phenomenon becomes even more puzzling if it is considered that the employees of both plants, at the time of termination, had basically the same average age, had been at their jobs for a considerable number of years, and worked only about a mile from one another. In addition, as demonstrated elsewhere, both suffered an equal amount of ill-health and stress associated with the closures.

Although it may be clutching at straws, it might be that the difference between the two groups was related to the union cultures in which they had participated, in varying degrees, during their time at SKF and CGE. As noted earlier, the union at SKF was somewhat conservative; in addition, the company was able to gain a considerable degree of personal allegiance from the workforce. Also, when direct action to save the plant was attempted, the employees were unresponsive.

The situation at CGE was a little different. Although by many standards the union was not radical, it was more militant than the one at SKF. In addition, there is little evidence to suggest that the company was able to gain the degree of personal allegiance found at SKF. Finally, unlike at SKF, the union at CGE was able to involve some employees in direct action to save their jobs. It could be that over time, particularly in an insecure job market, the union culture proved resilient and led to an eventual reappraisal of alternatives for political action.

Unfortunately, at this juncture, this explanation must be treated as hypothesis. More systematic and longitudinal data derived from closures with unions of varying degrees of militancy would have to be collected before the post-closure implications of union cultures could be assessed. The same is true with regard to the impact of union cultures on those who lose their jobs through other than mass terminations.

## CONCLUSION

To return to the concern with which this article started, it can be reiterated that if the political attitudes and behaviour of the unemployed are to be understood, they must be seen in an embrasive framework such as the one suggested here. At a general level, the perspective is consistent with the interactive 'power model' of working class radicalism in which it is postulated that «radicalism increases as the distribution of power resources between potential radicals and authorities shifts in favour of the radicals».

As a corollary, in view of the evidence collected here, it can be postulated that the political attitudes of the unemployed will vary in accordance with the general position of labour in society. Where labour organizations are weak, or are perceived as weak, and/or in circumstances in which the demand for labour is low, the unemployed will demonstrate low levels of political efficacy. In addition, in general, under these circumstances, those without jobs will be unlikely to have attitudes conducive to unconventional forms of political behaviour. Nonetheless, the possibility remains that considerations such as the political cultures of individual unions may affect this general relationship.

### *Les conséquences politiques du chômage: une application du «modèle de pouvoir» radical parmi les cols bleus*

Au cours des dernières années, le Canada, comme les autres sociétés occidentales, a fait l'expérience de la fermeture de nombreux établissements. Jusqu'à maintenant, on n'a consacré que peu d'efforts à l'examen en profondeur des conséquences du chômage en général et de la fermeture d'usines en particulier sur les attitudes et le comportement de leurs victimes.

Les recherches sur le chômage devraient tenir compte de plusieurs facteurs de même que de leurs interactions potentielles: 1) l'existence chez les sans-travail d'attitudes relatives à leur engagement politique en regard de la situation économique dans laquelle ils se trouvent; 2) la présence ou l'absence de structures bien organisées qui puissent faciliter leur action; 3) si celles-ci existent, l'évaluation de la façon dont elles sont perçues en tant que véhicules efficaces capables de traduire leur mécontentement présumé et, 4) en dernier ressort, l'ampleur de la capacité de pareilles structures pour canaliser leur insatisfaction et améliorer leur sort.

Conformément à cette perspective, les effets de la fermeture de l'usine de *S.K.F. Canada Ltd.* et de celle de Générale électrique du Canada (toutes deux situées à Toronto), ont fait l'objet d'un suivi d'une durée de 5 et de 2.5 années respectivement. Voici ce qui en est résulté.

En premier lieu, pour toute la période sous observation, la perception de détenir un pouvoir politique était moindre chez les anciens travailleurs de G.E.C. et leurs épouses que dans la population de l'Ontario en général. En second lieu, pendant la même période, les employés se considéraient moins engagés que leurs épouses. Troisièmement, avec le temps, on a noté un très léger déclin de l'engagement politique, principalement chez les femmes. Dans l'ensemble, pour ce qui en est des anciens employés de G.E.C. et de leurs épouses, l'effet manifeste de la fermeture entraîna une diminution continue de la participation à l'activité politique.

Alors que, si l'on tient compte de la période totale, les ex-salariés de G.E.C. et leurs épouses ont pu s'être sentis moins enclins à l'action politique que le reste de la population, leurs opinions ne différaient pas de celles des autres quant à la façon de considérer comment on pouvait opérer un changement légitime pendant la première année environ suivant la fermeture; toutefois, 27 mois plus tard, ils estimaient que le recours à des moyens inaccoutumés se justifiait pour changer cet état de choses.

Lorsqu'on compare les victimes de la fermeture de G.E.C. à celles de la fermeture de S.K.F., 27 mois après ces événements, les anciens employés de même que leurs épouses dans l'un et l'autre établissements se trouvaient au même point en ce qui concerne leurs perceptions de l'impuissance politique. Malgré ces sentiments, les ex-travailleurs de S.K.F. et leurs épouses étaient légèrement moins enclins que la population en général à recourir à des mesures nouvelles pour s'engager dans un processus de changement. Au contraire, leurs confrères de G.E.C. étaient davantage enclins que les gens en général à prendre des moyens qui n'étaient pas conventionnels pour obtenir un changement à leur situation.

Pendant toute la période couverte par cette étude, il est apparent que la plupart des sacrifiés de ces deux fermetures ne considéraient pas le N.P.D. comme une option viable. Cette opinion était sans doute à la fois une manifestation du comportement d'inefficacité politique sous-jacent qu'on avait décelé et un facteur qui y contribuait.

Alors que, d'une façon générale, les constatations tirées de l'enquête sont compatibles avec le «modèle du pouvoir», il est évident que, 27 mois après les fermetures, les ex-employés de G.E.C. désiraient, davantage que ceux de S.K.F., s'engager

dans une action politique qui n'était pas traditionnelle. Même si cette divergence est difficile à expliquer, il se peut que la différence entre les deux groupes soit attribuable à la formation et à la culture syndicales auxquelles ils avaient participé à des degrés divers pendant la durée de leur emploi. Avec le temps qui s'écoulait, surtout dans un marché du travail sans sécurité, l'activité syndicale relativement plus militante à G.E.C. peut avoir eu plus de mordant et avoir entraîné une réévaluation éventuelle des choix politiques.

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